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## NOTRE DAME DE L'EPINE, CHALONS, FRANCE.

THE beautiful edifice which bears the title of *Our Lady of the Thorn*, is situated at about five miles distance from Chalons-sur-Marne, and its strange old architecture forms a strikingly picturesque object in the scene, more like some luxuriant tropical plant than a mass of stone. The legend connected with its origin is simply told. In 1419 there stood upon that very spot a little chapel, surrounded by trees, and dedicated to St. John the Baptist. One night, as the story goes, when the shepherds were returning with their flocks from the neighbouring pastures, a bright light shone upon them; the sheep were terrified, and shrank away, but the lambs made straight for the holy place. It was the Feast of the Assumption. The shepherds, in surprise, followed the lambs, and lo, in the centre of the bright glory, they beheld an image of the Virgin holding the infant Jesus in her arms. As the night went on, the light grew brighter, and for miles and miles away was noticed with amazement.

So the priests of Meletto and the Bishop of Chalons, as soon as they heard of the occurrence, hastened to the spot, and among the thorn bushes outside the chapel of the Baptist, they discovered a small stone image of the Virgin; this they conducted with great pomp into the sacred building; and from that time the chapel became a place of great resort; there the richest offerings were presented, and at length Charles VI., of France, granted his royal letters patent for the erection of a church—a building, say the chroniclers, in every way befitting the miraculous appearance it was designed to commemorate.

At that period, a great part of France was under English rule. It was not then an idle boast when British sovereigns quartered with their arms the lily of St. Louis. The period was not far removed from the days of Joan of Arc. An English architect, whose name was Patrick, was employed to erect the new church, and under his direction the work proceeded with great rapidity. The façade, the nave, and the chief tower were soon completed, but the fortune of war gave that part of the country into the hands of the French, and the English being compelled to retreat, the architect took flight, and, alas! for the beautiful structure, carried off with him the funds intended for its completion.

Antoine Guichard proceeded, after some delay, with the work, and under his direction the church was rendered still more beautiful than any one had anticipated. They had resigned the work into Guichard's hands, rather than employed him to carry out the design of his predecessor; but the new architect modified the old plans, and by those modifications considerably improved them. In 1529 the church was finished. Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm of the people; the altar was crowded with costly gifts, the people of Verdun and Chalons gave a splendid window of stained glass—a window, by the way, which the fortune of war completely shattered a short time afterwards.

In the Revolution of 1789, five of the bells were melted down and converted into money, and one of the stately towers deprived of its spire and turned to new account by being made the station of the telegraph. In 1825 it sustained some accidental damage, but this was speedily repaired. The church is a truly beautiful specimen of the architecture of the fifteenth century. The entrance is admirably designed and exquisitely finished. A distinguishing feature is the fine and arcade-like aisle, which at the entrance rises upward like a pyramid, and is ornamented by a very large crucifix. The two bell towers are elaborately finished; the work of the old sculptors is as fresh and sharp as ever; and the rich tracery says much for the taste and judgment of those ancient artists. Viewed from without, the appearance of the church is remarkably beautiful; within, the beauty is still greater; and looking on the lofty pillars, on the rich tracery, on the sculptured roof, on every object that tells of bygone glory, our thoughts go wandering into the past, and we think of the mailed knights and mitred prelates, whose steps once echoed in those lofty aisles, but who have long ago been laid to sleep, while all their glory has passed away.

## POPULAR ERRORS, PREJUDICES, AND SUPERSTITIONS.

A VERY singular popular error, is the belief in the DIVINING-ROD. This rod, it was formerly supposed, was capable of pointing out the position of minerals in the earth, of hidden springs of water, and even capable of manifesting the guilt of criminals, and discovering stolen property. It is, however, no longer used in the latter capacity, the advance of knowledge having led men to require stronger proofs against an accused party than could be furnished by the divining-rod; but it is even yet employed here and in some other parts of the world, as a means of ascertaining the presence of water or metals. The divining-rod is a forked stick, generally of hazel, the limbs of the fork measuring about eighteen inches each; and about a quarter of an inch in diameter. To use it the diviner grasps the extremity of the limbs, one in each hand, the palms being turned upwards and the fingers inwards towards the body. Moving cautiously and slowly onwards step by step, with the rod held in this manner, the diviner on becoming aware of the action of hidden power, tightens his grasp of the fork; but, in spite of this, and though the bark is frequently wrenched from the rod in the struggle between the influence of the force which bears it downwards, and the efforts of the holder to keep it tight—in spite of this, we say, the limbs of the rod become bent outwards, and ultimately the head of the fork points perpendicularly downwards to the spot where the metal or the water is supposed to lie. Now, that the rod really does turn in this manner is beyond all question, no end of persons having testified to their having witnessed it; and that it acts thus in the hands of men whose character prevents the least suspicion of imposture, is an equally well-established fact. These men have tried it, and, as we have said before, found the green bark fairly wrenched off in their endeavours to prevent the rod from turning in their hands. What, then, is the cause of this action of the rod? Some authors have attributed it to magnetism and electricity. But the only probable solution of the mystery we have yet met with is that given by an American writer—when we say a solution of the mystery, we, of course, allude only to the cause of the rod's motion; as to its pointing to water, &c., that is simply a superstition. The explanation given appeared in a number of Professor Silliman's "American Journal of Science." The writer tells us how he witnessed the action of a divining-rod, which, held in the hands of a boy, distinctly traced out the course of a subterranean stream which was accordingly marked out as he went along. However, upon the boy being blindfolded, and led about from one part of the field to the other, although he frequently passed over the course of his newly-discovered spring, and though the rod kept continually pointing down in different places, it never pointed out the same spot twice; and the whole grass-plot was covered with marks until the course originally pointed out seemed completely lost. This looked very like an imposture on the boy's part. The writer, however, on a subsequent occasion, took the rod himself, and holding it in the diviner's manner, approached the bank of a rivulet, when, to his extreme astonishment, he began to feel the limbs of the rod crawling round, and saw the point turning downwards in spite of all the efforts his clenched hands could make to restrain it. So great was the struggle between the opposing forces, that he found the bark wrenched off the limbs of the rod, just as the diviners declare it sometimes happens. And yet, instead of its being really a contest, it is the very tightness and vigour with which the rod is held which alone causes it to move. He explains it thus:—Take the rod in the diviner's manner, and it is evident that the bent limbs of the rod are equivalent to two boughs tied together at one extremity; and when bent outwards they exert a force in opposite directions upon the point at which they are united. Held thus the forces are equal and opposite, and no motion is produced. Keep the arms steady, but turn the hands on the wrists inward an almost imperceptible degree, and the point of the rod will be constrained to move; and if the limbs be clenched

very tightly, so that they cannot turn in the hand, the bark will burst and wring off. The greater the effort made in clenching the rod, the shorter is the bend of the limbs, and the greater the amount of opposing forces meeting in one point; and the more unconsciously also do the hands incline to turn to their natural position on the wrists. And this gives true ground for the diviner's declaration, that the more powerful his efforts are to restrain the rod, the more powerful are its efforts to move. Thus explained, the divining-rod we see is capable of deceiving the holder of it no less than those who put their trust in him, and we can well conceive how the motion is conveyed from his hands to the rod, not only involuntarily, but even against his will.

There are several erroneous notions entertained in relation to the influence of the Moon upon our earth, which it may be as well to notice. That the moon does exert certain influences upon our planet by the force of gravitation, is, of course, unquestionable; few persons in the present day have the hardihood to deny that tides are governed by the moon. But is it equally certain that the moon occasions fine or wet weather? The question, we doubt not, will astonish many. We know that it is very generally believed that a new moon always, or nearly always, brings a change of weather. We know that careful observers have kept tables to ascertain how often a change of moon brings with it a change of weather. And yet, in spite of all this, we would ask one simple question, "In what part of the world is this influence exerted? If on the same day (without regarding any part of the world but our own little island), it is foggy in London, stormy in Liverpool, raining in Manchester, and beautifully fine in Bristol, which we know may frequently be the case, what becomes of the moon's influence on the weather? Is it likely that the same cause can produce such opposite effects in places but a few miles from each other?" There is another error in connexion with the moon's influence which is prevalent amongst gardeners. It is, that the moon which changes in April, and attains the full in the course of that month, or in the beginning of May, has the effect of freezing the young leaves and buds which are exposed to its light, although the thermometer stands at several degrees above the freezing point. The truth is, that the plants lose during the night, by radiation, a portion of the caloric which they have accumulated during the day; and as for this radiation to take place, it is necessary that the air should be clear, the gardeners attribute that to the presence of the moon which is, in fact, owing to the absence of clouds. It is by the same cause that meat exposed to the rays of the moon decays more quickly than it otherwise would. The radiation disengaging a greater amount of caloric, causes the meat to acquire a greater degree of moisture, and water is, as is well known, a great destroyer of animal matter.

A very prevalent belief is that caverns and other subterraneous places are colder in summer than they are in winter. This error arises from our judging of heat, as we do of most things, by comparison. The fact is that in places sheltered from the external influence of the seasons, the temperature scarcely varies at all throughout the year; but as we feel the heat or cold according as the surrounding temperature is greater or less than that of our own bodies, it follows that when we are cold the cavern appears warm, and, *vice versa*.

To be born with a CAUL was formerly considered a sign of great good fortune. "Since nature takes such particular care of this infant's head," said the believers in this superstition, "she must have something in store for it." We have spoken of the absurd belief in the past tense, but we fear it is hardly yet eradicated; nor do we doubt that there are still sailors who purchase children's cauls to bear about with them as a security against shipwreck. To quote the advertisements which were once so frequently to be met with, when is this ridiculous error about "a child's caul, to be disposed of?"

Our readers may, perhaps, be surprised at our naming CRUELTY amongst popular errors, and say it should rather be called a vice. True, in many instances, but in many others it results more exclusively from a habit, from a want of reflec-

tion—in short from prejudice. A few instances will explain how cruelty may be looked on as a prejudice. To go no further back than one, or at most two generations, did not our fathers, or at any rate our grandfathers, consider it their bounden duty, in order to bring up their children properly, to administer plentiful doses of the horsewhip? How long is it since flogging was considered essential to a boy's education by the heads of our public and private schools? Indeed, has it yet entirely disappeared from schools or families either? How long has it been discontinued in the army? And yet, in all cases where it has been abolished, the change has been attended with the most happy results. In regard to animals, too, how much unnecessary cruelty is exercised! Horses are overloaded and beaten—beaten often without the driver's even thinking of it—by a mere mechanical habit of the arm; and yet it has been ever found that animals which are well treated do a much greater amount of work. Thanks, however, to the "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals," these instances are of much less frequent occurrence than they were.

We have glanced above at one or two species of cruelty resulting from error; but there is one prejudice of a nature peculiar to itself which has ever been the cause of the greatest cruelties and hardships. We allude to the prejudice against certain races of mankind, and certain professions. For how long a time did the greater part of Europe, while condemning the prejudices which prevailed in the East against the outcast tribes of Guebres and Pariahs, maintain the same persecution in their own lands against the Jews. In fact, even to the present day, how cruel are the prejudices against this ancient race. The negroes are even more hardly dealt by still than the Jews. In fact, the upholders of the system of slavery absolutely deny that the negro even possesses reasoning faculties. Even amongst our own countrymen there is a prejudice somewhat resembling this entertained by many persons against the Irish. How many advertisements for servants tell the reader that "No Irish need apply." Is not this a part of the same system of persecution? Whatever objectionable qualities some individual Irish persons may possess, is it fair for that reason to set our face against a whole nation? But there are certain professions, as well as certain races, against which strong prejudice exists—that of an actor, for example. This prejudice, we are happy to say, is disappearing. It is beginning to be acknowledged that it is not a disgrace to embody those master-pieces of genius which it is looked upon as so glorious to create; that the man of genius need not be scouted from society because his talent places vividly before our eyes the very form and feature of those great creations. The question is now beginning to take its proper individual character; and no actor or actress who is respectable in his or her private character (and amongst this list may be included the names of many of the brightest ornaments of our stage) is to be denied the esteem which such character deserves, from the cruel and absurd prejudice which was formerly entertained against their profession.

There have been several rather curious errors entertained in regard to the influence of NUMBERS. Several of the ancients have constructed tables showing the different bearings of numbers upon human affairs. Pythagoras advised:—"Cultivate assiduously the science of numbers. Our vices and our crimes are only errors of calculation!" Amongst the different writers, seven was the number to which they attributed the most supreme importance. A singular application of this number to human life is the theory of CLIMACTERICS, or the epochs in life in which our constitution undergoes certain inevitable changes. These periods were stated by the ancients to occur every seven years, and the different climacterics were all made to harmonize with the magical number seven. The truth is, that the changes in the human system are by no means subjected to fixed periods, but vary according to locality, climate, individual temperament, &c.; and, in one word, that the whole doctrine of climacterics can only be looked upon as one of the numerous class of matters we have been treating of, and must, therefore, be consigned to oblivion, or only looked upon as a relic of the past.